Health of Home and School

LEAFLET NO. 4.

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The Danger of Uncleanliness.

We have been told that cleanliness is next to godliness. There is no question that habits of neatness and cleanliness have a desirable influence upon moral character, but the aim of this leaflet is to point out some physical dangers which are invited by habits of untidiness.

Uncleanliness of Earth.

Mother earth is cleanly in her instincts. If we let her have a decent chance, all impurity committed to her is rapidly made clean; but if we overburden her by pouring an excess of filth out upon the surface of the soil, or into the soil on or about the spot which we call home, we do that at our peril. The dangers of so doing are of two kinds:

1st. In the soil which is overburdened with the filth of slops, sink drainage, or soakage from outhouses, harmful and dangerous gases are formed. They pollute the air which we must breathe, and worst of all, our houses, heated artificially, act as a huge suction pump drawing these gases into cellar and up into every room of the house. Absolute proof has been obtained by careful experiments that gases liberated in the basement permeate the rooms on all the floors of a house no matter how tightly they are shut off from the basement. The gases of decomposition thus formed in unclean ground and sucked into houses are undesirable additions to the air supply for our lungs. So, observe this golden rule: keep clean the ground around the home and around the schoolhouse.

2d. From these same sources of filth, our springs and wells are polluted. The distance through which polluted soakage finds its way to wells or springs varies very much with the character of the soil or rock. It sometimes finds its way into wells for almost incredibly long distances. So this again emphasizes the necessity of obeying strictly the rule: keep sources of filth from the near vicinity of the home well or the school well.

Unclean Water.

There is no reason for wholesale condemnation of the farmer's well or the village well. Properly constructed and cared for, its water is, in this State, almost invariably good and wholesome. But many well waters which are clear and sparkling are nevertheless dangerous. In cholera times in London, the people came from far and near to get the water of the Bond Street well because they thought it so good and pure. But the death from cholera of a multitude of people was traced to this well. So the infection of typhoid fever coming from neighboring sources of filth brings typhoid fever and the hearse and the undertaker to many homes in Maine every year.

Unclean Air.

Leave a room or house shut up closely for only a day or two and the air becomes stuffy. Air to remain pure and health-giving must be unconfined. Stagnant air is a menace to health. In occupied rooms, the occupants are continually giving off from lungs and skin and clothing harmful gases. Lamps, oil-stoves, gas-stoves and other heaters not well managed, are continually spoiling the air. Remembering how potent the outdoor air is in bringing back to health persons stricken with some dangerous diseases, we should take this fact as an emphatic hint that pure air is even more potent and more successful in preventing disease than it is in curing it. And it should nudge our memory to keep the air of our school-rooms and our homes and that about our homes as pure and fresh as possible.

Unclean Food.

The uncleanliness of food endangers us in two ways as does the uncleanliness of water: (a) by the harmfulness of the uncleanliness itself, and (b) by the infectious matter which accompanies the filth or is transported to the food by it.

(a) The black sediment in the bottom of the bottle of dirty milk is unappetizing and is undoubtedly unwholesome, whether the milk is or is not sterilized by heating. The same may be said of the uncleanliness, as mere dirt, which adheres to the products which come from the dirty baker, marketman or confectioner; but there is another question beside the one of filth itself. Filth and infection are twin demons of evil who often go hand in hand—the chief of those human ills which escaped when Pandora opened her fateful box.

(b) Fed to the babe unsterilized, the sediment in the unclean milk with its disease germs from the intestinal canal of the cow or elsewhere, may give rise to a dangerous attack of diarrheal disease. The 400 or more deaths from infantile diarrhoea every year in Maine emphasize the danger from filth-borne infection, and not so much the danger from the filth itself.

Again, through unscreened windows and doors, the summer fly on his way from dirty places dots our food with filth. This filth often leaves the germs of typhoid fever or other infectious diseases upon our food. Milk, boiled potato, and various other food stuffs are excellent culture grounds for the rapid multiplication of these disease germs. Thus, dirty food becomes infectious food, and there is good reason to believe that many of the cases of typhoid fever are thus caused by flies.

And again, a careless person caring for a patient with typhoid fever, diphtheria, or tuberculosis may carry on her fingers which have not been carefully washed the infection to the food which she prepares for herself and others. These are some of the ways in which unclean food may endanger or destroy us.

And still again, some persons, with no suspicion of it, are infection carriers and from their own persons their fingers may become contaminated with the infection of diphtheria, typhoid fever or other serious diseases. The careful washing of hands before meals and before handling food to be eaten by oneself or by others is not only an esthetic habit but sometimes guards against dangers.

It should be remembered always that the unclean earth beneath and around our homes, unclean water, unclean air, unclean food, unclean houses, and unclean persons are serious dangers to health and life, and that the training of ourselves into systematic habits of overcoming these evils is only a reasonable and necessary kind of insurance against the immense trouble, cost, and sorrow which we are so often called upon to pay for our neglect of these important matters.

So let us practise and preach the gospel of cleanliness,—personal cleanliness, domestic cleanliness, and municipal cleanliness.